

Portland Press Herald

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EST
1862

MONDAY
JANUARY 7, 2002

Teens proudly choose to serve

● Rep. Tom Allen nominates 32 young men and women to attend service academies.

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Staff Writer

Don't mess with Ben Tourangeau.

He is not a Navy SEAL – not yet, at least. But he plans to be. And the 18-year-old All-American soccer forward from Cheverus High School already carries himself with a certain confidence.

He has reason to. He is one of 32 high school seniors from southern Maine whom U.S. Rep. Tom Allen nominated to attend a service academy – in Tourangeau's case, the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, N.Y. On Sunday, Allen hosted a reception for the nominees and their families.

The young people posed for photographs with the congressman while their parents and grandparents, bursting with

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U.S. Rep. Tom Allen

pride, looked on.

The service academies – the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colo., the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md., and the Merchant Marine Academy – are first-rate, competitive schools. Getting in always has been a big deal.

Now, though, the nation is at war. The young people who attend the academies feel the weight. Tourangeau hopes to.

So does Hannah Raymond, an 18-year-old Sanford High School senior nominated to go to West Point.

The war, of course, troubles her deeply, but she said that West Point would

prepare her.

Raymond, who lives in Springvale, said her town is supporting her. Her parents are, too.

James Walker, her stepfather, looked around the State of Maine room at Portland City Hall, where the reception took place. He saw, he said, "the best of what our society has to offer."

Walker, an Army veteran, said that like any father, he'd worry if his stepdaughter faced harm. But he, too, was confident.

"I have that faith," he said. "I have that trust, and if anything bad happens..."

Raymond didn't let him finish: "I'll take care of it," she said.

That's how they were, all the nominees.

David Greenwood, an 18-year-old Cape Elizabeth High School student whom Allen nominated to West Point, wore an American flag lapel pin and said he feels good about the country, good about his future.

He said he planned to join the service even before the attacks of Sept. 11, and that the terrorism merely "showed me that it's the right thing."

Yet things are different now.

"At certain times in the past," Allen said, "people have been able to think of a service career with the risk of combat being fairly remote. It's not remote today, and to me, that is different."

He looked at the room, at the young people who are prepared to serve their country.

And he felt proud, too.

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